THE MEASURE
A JOURNAL OF POETRY

Poems by Hazel Hall, George O'Neil, Carolyn Hall, Louise Bogan, Hervey Allen, Winifred Welles, Joseph Auslander, Babette Deutsch and Others

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The Measure

A Journal of Poetry

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Young Simon Peter

YOUNG Simon Peter touched his helm with pride,
Stepped back, bare-foot, to where the shore had dried,
Hoped other fishermen were going by,
Looked at his new ship and glanced at the sky,
Then with a long-stride run he set her free—
Out, out she headed over Galilee.
This was a holiday; he would not fish.
It was enough to hear the lazy swish
Of bright lake water on his own fine boat—
She had so recently been set afloat,
And only yesterday, it seemed, had stood
(So excellent a piece of cedar wood)
One with the grove at Lebanon. The lake
Of Galilee was calm. His fading wake
Grew longer, spreading like the untrod lane
A breeze makes running down a field of grain.
What a deep-colored, windless, waveless day!
Peter threw back his head and pulled away
To east, glad that his life had not run out
In years before men learned to get about
On seas and took to building boats. A flash
Of curving silver and a foamy splash
Marked the bent path of a fish, sun-bound,
And unseen beauty hidden all around,
Leaped up. The sunlight in his boat grew quick
As twilight in the hills where snows are thick.
And Simon Peter (youth was most to blame)

Caught up these ends of glory in a flame
Of phantasy and lost himself in dreams
Awhile. "Life is so great," he thought, "it gleams
Only through cracks to show us where we are;
Now it's a shaft of sunlight, now a star . . .
I should be more than fisherman, content
To cast my gray nets here while time is spent
And I grow old. Even the fall and rise
Of cities would not stir this lake-sea." Twice
He gazed to south where unsung Bethlehem
Grazed in the shadow of Jerusalem.

Making for north another boat sailed by,
And Peter heard them singing shrill and high:

Haul in,
Haul in,
Haul in your net!
The fish
Are rising
In Gennesaret.

Plenty,
O plenty
For all of Galilee,
When the fishermen,
Ho fishermen!
Begin to comb the sea.

Haul in,
Haul in,
Haul in your net!
Fine silver
Fishes
Come from Gennesaret.

Now Peter was a fisherman and knew
The song. Singing it lustily, he flew
Across the lake to shore, and he was filled

With fellowship of men and sea, and thrilled
Again. But when, with water to his knees,
He waded in, he lost the glow of these.
His eyes sought far horizons and the west,
Aflame, woke his old longing for a test.
Slowly he hauled his nets up on the sand,
Pulled in his boat and made her fast to land.

As he went up the white Bethsaida road,
He heard no warning in the cock that crowed.

Carolyn Hall

Gargantua

GARGANTUAN ranges of blue-dappled hills
Roll down titanic coasts of cobalt shires,
And inland dreams a sunstruck city's ghost
And herds of mooncalves graze near towered byres.
Down, down the hills a bull-voiced waterfall
Plunges from cloudy cliffs that climb so high,
It shudders like an organ from a hall
Up stairs that wind into the windy sky.
And there are bestial footprints in the sand
That twist up rusty roadways red as snakes
Onto an upland paved with level floors
Of copper water stagnant in iron lakes.
And hooded peaks vault into clouded wonder,
From whence the island's voice drifts out to sea,
Reverberating words of blatant thunder,
Dull as a demon's glee.
Its hills sequester meadows, walled with fire,
On which like evil prayers the sphinxes lie,
With flame-like plumes that bloom upon their wings,
While red clouds wither by—
The eagle's shadow drifts along its cliffs
And in the evening from a mountain's dome,
Remote as thought, there blurs the sound of drums
That call the giants home.

Hervey Allen

Two Sonnets

I

ANTIGONE and Helen—would they laugh
To see La Belle Florinda shake her limbs?
How would the sacred Eleusinian hymns
Sound on the record of a phonograph?
Oh, you who cherish La Belle's autograph,
Who serve her eyebrows and her slightest whims,
Oh, you who pay her supper bills at Tims'
Who pride yourself that you can stand the gaff—

Would you be shocked beyond your puny wits
Were you to stumble on the hidden glade
Where Bacchanals and Helen danced and swayed
Nude in the moonlight? Ah, the code that fits
The glowing Broadway lights is much too staid
To tolerate such frolics in the shade!

II

OR is it all illusion? Do the years
Cover with glamor what was tawdry then?
Did moralists and such like thunder when
Antigone got drunk on Attic beers,
And danced too freely mid the eager leers
Of Plato's seniors, who bought up the glen
To prove to Athens that they lived like men—
And gave Antigone the college cheers?

It may be so. I should not think it strange.
Herodias, Antigone, La Belle—
One sisterhood. Perhaps we do not change
As much as some pretend to think. Ah, well—
Don't let me spoil your pleasure in the show—
For me, my vision of the long ago!

David P. Berenberg

To M. A. S.

YOU sought the stars, like that Exile who fared
From hell to heaven by a road you knew.
And yet, why should they always say of you,
"She was not of this earth; her spirit shared
A higher life than ours." Oh, when you lay
So near the end of that last fight for breath,
So nearly touching that which we call death,
I know you saw the things that filled your day:
Sun on the wall perhaps, and then again
A long road lashed with silver summer rain,
Free-swinging trees, a half-forgotten face . . .
Why should they think that other-worldly scenes
Gave you your wistful beauty, and the grace
Of some frail angel of the Florentines?

Tumbleweed

OH bounding, brittle balls that spin so lightly
Aslant the grass,
With what an air of purpose, firm yet sprightly,
You whirl—and pass!

I wish I still could think your dashing progress
Was yours alone;
I wish I had not seen you, huddled lifeless,
When winds were gone.

Susanne Howe

White Fear

I AM not afraid in April,
I am cool enough to pass
Where robins burn like embers
And tulips scorch the grass.

But oh, when snow has fallen
On a little city park,
I would not dream to venture
Alone there in the dark!

For if I made one motion
Along the muffled street,
Whole whitened trees would tumble
Into ashes at my feet.

The almond lamps would ripen
In the velvet shell and fall
Upon the plush of pavements
With no sound at all.

And trembling in the silence
Like someone very old,
I would find my hair silver
And feel my heart cold.

Winifred Welles

Incomprehensible

I WOULD that I could know, my dear,
What need God has of dullness here,
And what need there of radiancy—
Your radiancy that lighted me.

Mary Dean

Molds

"ONE takes up something for a livelihood and dreams he'll leave it later."

Domesday Book

But the years creak on and on
And the metal warps to the mold;
Dulled is the white-hot fire
That ran through the smelting gold.

Rigid the vessel grows,
Cracked by cold at the crust;
Tarnish films the shine
And the mouth is choked with dust.

Fire in the furnace leaps
And new ores hotly run
But the old lies twisted, fixed
And rots in the rusty sun.

Mildred Plew Merryman

Of Beauty and Love

YOU say: have done at last with love and beauty,
remember hate and hunger and disease:
men huddled round street-fires of broken boxes;
women who scrub old floors on burning knees;

people who feed the vermin at their tables;
lovers who sleep with vermin in their bed;
men rising at bleak hours to bleaker labors;
the living, who are colder than their dead.

But love, a winter sparrow in the gutter,
plucks at the dung and lifts her single note,
and beauty, rousing like a sullen lion,
from alley jungles shakes her thunderous throat.

Babette Deutsch

Your Audience

POET, your utterance becomes my breath.
The rhythm of my pulses is the song
That burned in yours when once your blood was flame
And sang an hour of silence into fire.
Then, if your breath is mine, your singing mine,
Mine, too, the swift surrender to your whim
That is laughter on the lips of truth; and mine
The crying of your feet, and mine your eyes
Seeking to cool their sight upon horizons
Where minarets may justify the sun.

Poet, giving me breath,
The secret fury of your silences,
The password of your fancy that unlocks
Gates lightly swung upon the hinge of space,
Giving me your abandonment of time,
You lay your poem in my lifted hands.

Poet, now it is mine.
It has been sung and is for you a spent
Passion—a white smoke moving on the sky.
It has appeased your singing heart and given
Your feet a faith for having wandered well.
Then wrap the folds of your accomplishment
In a cloak about your sated shoulders; know
For you it is a journey old and done,
For me, a calling. Go, leave me alone
To live the wonder you have given me.

The names of places that are named with music
Shall be the singing signposts where I go.
And coolly and forever unamazed
I will find roads to tangle with my feet—
Roads intricate, ironic—roads and roads
To thirst for, thrill for, sing for, live for—die.
And I will be forever undismayed
At moonlit eyes, at tropical descents

And lightly ancient follies at my lips.
For my ignorance shall be split by screeching birds,
My innocence dissolved into the spray
Of cataracts and rivers leaping past . . .

Poet, well may you mourn,
And wrapped in heavy robes of your fulfilment,
Well may you envy me my unspent tread,
Envy my colored days, my tempted nights.
For you there is a journey old and done,
For me, a calling, and my breathing answer
That is an everlasting restlessness.

Hazel Hall

Where It Is Winter

NOW there is frost upon the hill
And no leaf stirring in the wood;
The little streams are cold and still;
Never so still has winter stood.
Never so held as in this hollow,
Beneath these hemlocks dark and low,
Brooding this hour that hours must follow
Burdened with snow. . . .

Now there is nothing, no confusion,
To shield against the silence here;
And spirits, barren of illusion,
To whom all agonies are clear,
Rush on the naked heart and cry
Of every poignant shining thing
Where there is little left to die
And no more Spring.

George O'Neil

Frailty, Thy Name Is —

O CREDULOUS and constant, though I tell
Over and over crazy golden things,
Yet you believe them: though I say, "Her wings
Were moondrift"; or "A bright red cockerel
Stalked across the sky at sunset, fell
Into a pool of stars, and left white rings
Of water-dust on darkness"; your hand clings
Tightly to mine, your heart accepts the spell.

Some day I shall begin, "She struck a bell
Of raindrops in the lupin's rocking steeple . . .
And when I look up, you will murmur, "Well?"
Quite like a hundred million other people:
Then I will think how beautiful you were
When you insisted that the pansies purr.

Blind Searcher

O CCULT, sequestered, and companionless,
I hear you tugging frantic at the tents
Of some antique and white magnificence,
Some torso sculptured out of restlessness
Whose limbs surrendered to a lost caress . . .
Blind searcher, when the guards of death dispense
Beautiful fragments piled in one excess
Of marble, will the fever to possess
Vanish serene, robbed of its turbulence?

Or will you, in that final audience,
Remember hands you never dared to press,
And tortured desperate with imminence
Grope frenziedly and clutch at emptiness?
Or will you, where no longer visions are,
Touch by a dream the shadow of a star?

Joseph Auslander

Toul Sector—October

THE AVIATORS' BARRACKS—*Saizerais*

ALTHOUGH fall violets bloomed in those damp woods,
Blue petals waiting for the silver frost;
And still the trees preserved their summer green;
The nights were unimaginably cold.
High walls of blankets and the woolen folds
Of knitted warmth were all inadequate
Refuge against the icy fog that pierced
Deeper and deeper like a sworded ghost.
The fog? It was the frigid exhalation
Of death, that dwelt so near by day and night,
Breathed on us in the darkness while we slept.

Kenneth Slade Alling

Chicago River

BROWN oil, the water, where two barges start
To empty the untouched of city plates;
Their prows bump greasy peacock tails apart,
Each scattered tail swirls back to whole and waits
Along its window-palisaded straits:
The smoky bridge will hump its creaky back
And let new fat hulks through the peacock gates . . .
These murky voyageurs of charted track
Are helmsmen bleak and still and lone, and lack
What joy of persecuting peacock tails
The rope-nosed prows draw, logging through the black,
Out to the dump beneath the yellow sails . . .
No boatman speaks . . . and each would carry out
A winter plan the other spoke about.

Thomas Hornsby Ferril

Women

WOMEN have no wilderness in them,
They are provident instead,
Content in the tight hot cell of their hearts
To eat dusty bread.

They do not see cattle cropping red winter grass,
They do not hear
Snow water going down under culverts
Shallow and clear.

They wait, when they should turn to journeys,
They stiffen, when they should bend.
They use against themselves that benevolence
To which no man is friend.

They cannot think of so many crops to a field
Or of clean wood cleft by an axe.
Their love is an eager meaninglessness
Too tense or too lax.

They hear in any whisper that speaks to them
A shout and a cry.
As like as not, when they take life over their door-sill
They should let it go by.

Louise Bogan

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Announcement of the Next Editors

CAROLYN HALL has been elected Acting Editor for March, April and May, and George O'Neil, Assistant Editor.

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